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# Affirmation

Fall 1994

Volume 19

Number 3

## THEATER REVIEW

By David Gunnel and  
Judith Cara-Hicks

**HOME: A Parable of Beatrice and Neal**, an original musical drama by Timothy McGinley, toured in 15 cities across the Midwest area in June. The show was produced by the Reconciling Congregation Program (PCP) to coincide with their tenth anniversary.

"HOME" is a story about six people searching for harmony, peace and a center in their lives. Neal (Don Fresen) and Beatrice (Ginny Bartholomew) meet through a common friend, Barbara (Suzanne Preston). Neal is a gay man who attended seminary, but did not finish. He currently works as a social worker but is not completely fulfilled in his work. He doesn't belong to a church community. Beatrice is a straight woman who finished seminary and is married to the town's well-known homophobic minister. Barbara has repressed her call to the ministry, and has ended up support-

*Please turn to page ten...*

## California-Pacific United Methodists Agree on Definition of Homosexuality

REDLANDS, Calif. (UMNS)--In an apparent attempt to stave off "witch hunts," as well as to adhere to a denominational ban on homosexual clergy, United Methodists in the California-Pacific region agreed June 18 to define homosexuals as people who publicly admit to having sex with others of the same gender.

Statements made in private or "under duress" are not considered avowals, the statement of definition said, and "practicing" does not include having same-sex roommates, or socializing with or supporting the rights of homosexuals.

*Please turn to page eleven...*

## Conference Tries Non-confrontational Approach to Topic of Homosexuality

(UMNS)--For the last four years, debate among Troy, N.Y., area United Methodists over the issue of homosexuality and the church has been marked by painful, factional arguments and got-you-last resolutions passed during summer sessions.

\*\*\*\*\*  
...a different approach to the controversial topic.

\*\*\*\*\*

At their 1994 legislative assembly June 2-5, Troy's clergy and lay delegates, representing 250 local congregations in the Albany, N.Y., area, took a dif-

*Please turn to page eleven...*

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**The National Gathering  
Los Angeles October 7-9, 1994**

*Please see insert for details and Registration Form*

**Deadline for Registering is September 15, 1994**



## AFFIRMATION HAS A NEW TELEPHONE NUMBER

**Affirmation:** United Methodist's new national phone number is (708) 733-9590. Our past phone number of 15 years was Affirmation member Michael Troyer's home number. Michael died last November and his lover agreed to continue to pass on Affirmation's messages. This new number is solely for Affirmation. With our office staff answering the phone messages, the turn around time will be swifter.

This new phone number will be our permanent number for the next 15 years. We do need help passing on this information. Our old number is very well known, and people are still getting the old number from somewhere (some think that our old number is on church bathroom walls). The Communications and Evangelism Committee has passed on our new number to the national Gay Yellow Pages and to local lesbian and gay publications that we have on our press list. Some communities have a local Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Yellow Pages or support groups that have directories that are not on our mailing list. The Committee asks that all persons help pass out Affirmation's new phone number. Please contact any support any support community center or your local community paper and give them our new number.

We do give a big thanks to Michael Troyer's lover, Joseph Zendell, for all his help with this situation.

*The Communications and  
Evangelism Committee*

### Gay Rights Sup- porters Circle Godbox in Protest

**N**EW YORK (UMNS)--Sup-  
porters of gay and lesbian rights  
joined hands during a June 24  
demonstration here to encircle  
the Interchurch Center--  
popularly known as the  
"Godbox" at 475 Riverside  
Drive.

**"W**e are here to open  
people's minds and hearts and let  
God out of the box," said the  
Rev. Kittredge Cherry, spokes-  
woman for the Universal  
Fellowship of Metropolitan Com-  
munity Churches, a largely gay  
and lesbian denomination, which  
organized the event.

**T**he Interchurch Center houses  
offices of the National Council of  
Churches (NCC) and various de-  
nominations--including several  
United Methodist agencies. Met-  
ropolitan Community Churches  
repeatedly has been denied mem-  
bership in the NCC.

**C**riticizing liberals for their  
"silence and complicity" in the  
denial of gay religious rights,  
the Rev. Nancy Wilson, pastor  
of a Los Angeles Metropolitan  
Community Church, said it is  
time to demand the end of  
worldwide religious abuse against  
gays, lesbians and bisexuals.

**"'S**orry' isn't good enough,"  
she added. "Change has to  
happen."

**T**he Rev. Joan Campbell, NCC  
general secretary, was among  
those who joined hands at the  
base of the building and then  
held a rainbow-colored ribbon  
that remained when the protest  
ended.

**T**he date of the demonstration  
coincided with the 25th anniver-  
sary of the Stonewall rebellion in  
New York, which is credited as  
the beginning of the gay-rights  
movement.



### WARNING SIGNS

*A new book by the Anti-  
Defamation League sounds yet  
another alarm about the right  
wing*

*(from Bay Windows)*

by Serine Steakley

A new book documents the  
attempt by right-wing Christian  
organizations to impose a theo-  
cracy on the United States and  
to structure a government with  
absolute intolerance of lesbians  
and gay men and numerous  
other groups of Americans.

\*\*\*\*\*  
...a crusade against gays,  
Jews...and anyone else who  
doesn't fit...

\*\*\*\*\*

"The Religious Right: The As-  
sault on Tolerance & Pluralism in  
America," published by the  
Anti-Defamation League, details  
a crusade against gays, Jews,  
feminists, proponents of pro-  
choice, supporters of public  
education and anyone else who  
doesn't fit in to the religious  
rights' vision of a "Christian  
nation."

*Please turn to page four...*



## Non-discrimination bill draws support of church executives

WASHINGTON (UMNS)--Executives of the United Methodist Board of Church and Society have joined other groups and denominations supporting a new bill related to equal employment opportunities.

If passed, the Employment Non-discrimination Act of 1994 will prohibit work-place discrimination based on sexual orientation. The bill has been introduced with bipartisan support in both houses of the U.S. Congress.

As written, the bill exempts small businesses, religious organizations and the military, but applies to Congress, and prohibits any preferential treatment based on sexual orientation.

The act does not require an employer to provide benefits for a same-sex partner of an employee, but does not prohibit it.

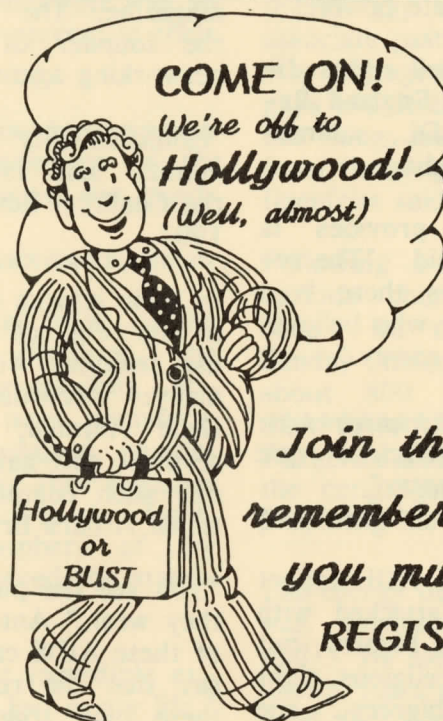
Noting that the denomination has been actively engaged in addressing issues of justice in the work place for more than 250 years, the Rev. Thom White Wolf Fassett, general secretary of the Board of Church and Society, indicated support of the bill.

"We will join now in a coalition of denominations in the United States to form an alliance which will provide support and work with our members back home in the towns, villages and cities of America to encourage Congress to pass this important act," Fassett stated.

He was the only representative of the religious community to speak at a press conference here June 23. The other speakers were U.S. Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.); U.S. Reps. Barney Frank (D-Mass.); Jerrold Nadler (D-N.Y.); and Gerry Studds (D-Mass.); Coretta Scott King; Ralph G. Neas, chief executive of the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights; and Justin Dart Jr., former chairman of the Presidents Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities.

Several speakers referred to polls that indicated that more than 70 percent of U.S. citizens believe gay people should not be discriminated against in jobs.

Additional statements distributed at the press conference included one from religious leaders who had endorsed the bill. The statement--signed by Jane Hull Harvey, an assistant general secretary at the Board of Church and Society, among others--called for an end to discrimination against workers "because they are gay, lesbian, or because someone perceives them as such."



*Join the fun...but  
remember...  
you must*

**REGISTER BY**

**SEPT. 15!**

*The  
National Gathering*

**AFFIRMATION  
UNITED METHODISTS**

*for  
Gay, Lesbian & Bisexual Concerns*

*October 7-9, 1994  
Los Angeles, California*

**Use the enclosed Registration Form!**



Warning Signs..from page two

"During the past 15 years," states the introduction in the book written by David Cantor of the ADL, "an exclusionist religious movement in this country has attempted to restore what it perceives as the ruins of a Christian nation by seeking more closely to unite its version of Christianity with state power."

Sally Greenberg, civil rights director of the New England Regional office of ADL, summarized the book's findings.

"The picture it provides is frightening," she said. "The religious right thinks there is a war on and anyone who believes in pluralism is the enemy."

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"criticism of the religious right is not religious bigotry"  
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Greenberg said the ADL report has already been attacked with charges of religious bigotry, but "criticism of the religious right is not religious bigotry," she said. She went on to emphasize the stress the book put on the importance of religion in this society.

The book reports many radical pronouncements of right wing leaders such as the statement, feminists "kill their children, practice witchcraft and become lesbians."

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..."The Gaybashers" is devoted to documenting and analyzing a portion of the religious right's attack on gays.  
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The book focuses primarily on anti-Semitism, but Cantor consistently paints a larger picture of a religious movement on the move against a wide diversity of people. For instance, he

includes reports on the religious right's anti-gay agenda throughout. In addition, one chapter of the book titled, "The Gaybashers," is devoted to documenting and analyzing a portion of the religious right's attack on gays.

The chapter begins with a quote from an interview in the gay magazine, The Advocate, with the founder of an evangelical networking agency.

"Homosexuality makes God vomit," said Jay Grimstead of the Coalition Revival in October, 1992.

In their attacks on gays, leaders of the religious right frequently use analogies with Hitler's Germany. According to the book, Gene Antonio, the author of several anti-gay books, made one such comparison at a National Affairs Briefing in 1992.

"You see the pink triangles that they wear," Antonio said, "a lot of these AIDS carriers, and they say that the reason they wear these pink triangles is because the homosexuals were forced to wear them in the Nazi death camps. The reality is, the Nazi movement--the New World Order of its day--was put on the map by militant homosexuals. The Brown Shirts were run by homosexuals. That is total revisionist history they're coming up with, ladies and gentlemen...We are facing a homosexual Gestapo."

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"...good men, support executions [for homosexuals]...but most of us are not promoting that at this time."  
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"The hard-core reconstructionists," Grimstead said, "who I believe are good men, support executions [for homosexuals]. We do believe that homosexuals and abortionists are committing

murder, but most of us do not support the death penalty for them. This means that we are not being entirely consistent with the Bible, I know, but most of us are not promoting that *at this time.*" (Italics are mine--editor.)

☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆  
...the religious right's attack on homosexuality is part of a larger concern...  
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In the "Gaybashers" chapter, Cantor notes that the religious right's attack on homosexuality is part of a larger concern of the religious right "involving governmental regulation of sex and sex roles--abortion, feminism, pornography and homosexuality."

The chapter includes a brief summary of a conspicuous anti-gay group, The Report. Associated with the Springs of Life Church in Lancaster, California, the organization produces anti-gay videos and other material. "The Gay Agenda," a 20-minute video, has been its most prominent project. Sent to members of Congress and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, broadcast on Christian television and promoted in religious right wing publications, the video has also been used extensively in political battles around state anti-gay initiatives. According to Cantor, by the end of last summer, "sales of The Gay Agenda reportedly had topped 80,000."

"Despite pretensions to scientific neutrality," Cantor writes. "The Gay Agenda consists primarily of discredited statistics, melodramatic testimonies about gay life, and lurid tape loops. The repetition of these prurient images demonstrates an almost voyeuristic preoccupation with the very sexual activity the video condemns."





# AFFIRMATION NATIONAL GATHERING

OCTOBER 7-9, 1994

LOS ANGELES/WEST HOLLYWOOD, CALIFORNIA

## REGISTRATION FORM

To register, complete this form and mail to: Affirmation  
P. O. Box 1021  
Evanston, IL 60204

**DEADLINE: SEPTEMBER 15, 1994**

▼ ▼ ▼ ▼ ▼ ▼ ▼ ▼ ▼

NAME (to appear on Name Badge) \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

TELEPHONE \_\_\_\_\_

I DESIRE PRIVATE HOUSING (Cannot be guaranteed; Deadline September 7) \_\_\_\_\_

SPECIAL NEEDS \_\_\_\_\_

IS THIS YOUR FIRST AFFIRMATION GATHERING? \_\_\_\_\_ YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO

RESERVATIONS FOR SATURDAY BANQUET ONLY \_\_\_\_\_ (Number of Reservations)

▼ ▼ ▼ ▼ ▼ ▼ ▼ ▼ ▼

REGISTRATION FEE \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Income	Fee
Student/Subsistence	\$ 25.00
Under \$20,000/year	45.00
\$20,001 - \$30,000/year	65.00
\$30,001 - \$40,000/year	90.00
Over \$40,000/year	100.00
Saturday Banquet Only	20.00

I am enclosing an additional amount to enable another person to attend \$ \_\_\_\_\_

TOTAL ENCLOSED (Check Payable to National Affirmation) \$ \_\_\_\_\_

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# Fall National Gathering in Los Angeles October 7-9

**AFFIRMATION**, United Methodists for Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Concerns, will hold its National Gathering in Los Angeles, October 7-9 at the Hyatt Hotel in West Hollywood. With a theme of *Outing the Bible*, the featured speaker will be Rev. Elder Nancy Wilson, Pastor of Metropolitan Community Church of Los Angeles.

**Meeting Site:** The Gathering will be held at the Hyatt Hotel on Sunset Strip in West Hollywood, just a few blocks from the heart of Gay and Lesbian Los Angeles.

**Schedule:** The Gathering will begin with a reception on Friday evening at 7:00 p.m. Saturday will include the plenary session, workshops and business meeting. Our banquet is Saturday evening. Worship is on Sunday at one of the Reconciling Congregations in the area.

**Program:** Our featured speaker will be Rev. Elder Nancy Wilson of the Metropolitan Community Church of Los Angeles. She is a nationally recognized authority on Biblical misinterpretations as applied to bisexual, lesbian and gay persons. Her presentation will be on Saturday morning.

Several workshops will be offered on Saturday afternoon.

**Workshop 1:** Dr. Craig O'Neill, a Roman Catholic priest, is co-author of *Coming Out Within: Stages of Spiritual Awakening for Lesbians and Gay Men*. This workshop will explore how loss can serve as a catalyst for growth.

**Workshop 2:** Michael Nava and Robert Dawidoff are authors of the recently published book, *Created Equal: Why Gay Rights Matter to America*. This workshop will offer a discussion on the importance of civil rights for gay, lesbian and bisexual persons and the church's role in this process.

**Workshop 3:** Describing herself as an "HIV-positive, transsexual lesbian," Connie Norman is Community Outreach Director for the All Saints AIDS Service Center in Pasadena. Rev. Jim Conn is pastor of The Church in Ocean Park, a Reconciling Congregation in Santa Monica. This workshop will focus on the relationship between the church and the gay, lesbian and bisexual community.

**Banquet:** Rev. Dr. James Lawson, pastor of Holman United Methodist Church in Los Angeles will be our speaker. He has been active in the civil rights movement for all Americans for many years. He hosts a weekly talk show, *Lawson Live*, seen nationally on Friday evening on the Faith and Values Channel (formerly VISON).

The entertainment is a surprise, but remember...We are in (West) Hollywood!

**Worship:** On Sunday we will worship with one of the Reconciling Congregations in the area. Our worship will be lead by Rev. Lisa Bove, Parish Associate at United University Church in Los Angeles, a More Light/Reconciling Congregation.

**Accommodations:** As the site of the Gathering, The Hyatt on Sunset Hotel is the best choice for accommodations. A flat rate of \$73 per room will be in effect for the weekend of the Gathering and for two days before and after. Since this is a flat rate, room-sharing will bring the cost down considerably. Reservations can be made by calling the Hyatt at (800) 233-1234 or your travel agent. Be sure to indicate that you will be attending the "Affirmation National Gathering" for the special low rate. **TRY TO MAKE YOUR RESERVATIONS BY SEPTEMBER 14, 1994.** No guarantee of availability can be made after that date. A very limited number of private houseing will be provided. Staying at the Hyatt is encouraged as it will be much more convenient as well as affording the opportunity of forging new friendships.

**Registration:** To register for the Gathering, please complete the Registration Form found in this issue of the Newsletter. The deadline for registration is **September 15, 1994**. You must register to participate. **DO NOT ASSUME** anyone knows you will be in attendance.

**Accessibility:** The Hyatt Hotel is wheelchair accessible.

**Questions?** If you have any, call the Affirmation: Los Angeles InfoLine at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED] or write to [REDACTED] West Hollywood, CA [REDACTED]



(from the Windy City Times, via Bay Windows)

## Teamwork of a different kind in Seattle

Two men speak of their appointment as the first gay couple picked to minister in a mainline denomination.

by Kimberly Griffin

CHICAGO--Two years and more than 100 rejection letters later, an opening gay Chicago couple has finally realized their dream: A congregation in Seattle on June 12 officially called the pair to their church to share a position as associate pastors, marking the first time a mainline church has done so.

...they still couldn't believe it was real.

In their Hyde Park home recently, just days after the announcement, Peter Ilgenfritz, 32, and David Shull, 35, said they still couldn't believe it was real.

"We did not know when we walked out of the church what the vote was going to be," said Shull.

...answering a myriad of questions about their philosophy of the church, their calling to the ministry, and...their homosexuality...

After nearly a week of meeting hundreds of parishioners of University Congregational Church/United Church of Christ, a 1,200 member congregation, and answering a myriad of questions about their philosophy of the church, their calling to the ministry, and, of course, their homosexuality, Ilgenfritz and Shull preached during the Sunday morning service June 12. They then headed to a friend's home three blocks away--"biting our nails" the whole time--while the congregation debated their fate.

An hour and a half later, the word came. They needed at least two-thirds of the vote to be called: The final vote was an overwhelming 76 percent in their favor.

...it was the members of the church who deserved the standing ovation.

When they walked back to the sanctuary that afternoon, the congregation was standing, applauding their new ministers. But for two ordained pastors who chose to leave their parishes rather than remain in the closet, it was the members of the church who deserved the standing ovation.

"It was the most incredible experience I'd ever had in my life," Shull said.

"It was an utterly holy moment," Ilgenfritz agreed.

To Rev. Bob Fitzgerald, assistant minister at the Seattle congregation where Ilgenfritz and Shull will begin working in mid-August, the pair "rose to the top" out of 50 applicants from across the country.

"All issues were on the table from the very beginning."

"From the beginning, Peter and Dave in their profile, in their letters and in conversations with people here were openly gay," Fitzgerald said. "All issues were on the table from the very beginning."

Welcoming gays ...in the pews is one thing; asking them to preach...is quite another.

Although the congregation voted several years ago--with more than 80 percent--to become a church open and affirming to gays and lesbians, hiring an openly gay couple to be their associate pastors was a different step altogether. Welcoming gays and lesbians in the pews is one thing; asking them to preach from the pulpit is quite another, Ilgenfritz said.

Following a week of attending various church meetings, the couple led the church service Sunday morning, attended by about 800 parishioners--more than twice the regular number, Fitzgerald said. After their exit, the congregation got to work, preparing the final vote.

The energy during the discussion was immeasurable, Fitzgerald said. To assuage some parishioners' fears of losing members--and their contributions--a married man in his 40s with children, walked up to the associate pastor and handed her a check for \$10,000.

"Some would call that a miracle," Fitzgerald said.

But that wasn't all. At one point during the open mike discussion, an unassuming 73-year-old woman walked up to the front of the sanctuary, looked out over the congregation, and proceeded to come out as a lesbian.

"...our candidacy has opened up possibilities for people in the church to be more honest."

"When we heard about that," Shull said, "we lost it. You just Please turn to page twelve..."



Review...from page one

ing her husband by being the "good little minister's wife." She clearly feels unfulfilled in her life.

Barbara sets up a meeting with Beatrice and Neal, who also includes some of his friends. David (Drew Gorby) is the

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*David had to go through the trauma of his lover's death while being ostracized by his church...*

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intellectual one of the group. He, and his now deceased lover, were shunned by their church community because of his lover's KS marks. David had to go through the trauma of his lover's death while being ostracized by his church and is clearly in great emotional pain. Rita (Elizabeth Bowman) is a young lesbian who seems to be standing still--not going anywhere with her life. Chris (Gregory Johnson) is stereotypical as a flamboyant gay man and he hides his pain behind a mask of illusion and a quick-witted tongue. The seventh member of the cast is The Storyteller (Ruthe Miller), who does an excellent job of weaving the stories together and helping it all make sense to the audience.

It seems that the meeting with Neal and his friends was set up by Barbara to help open Beatrice's eyes. Her husband's

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*...the characters...deal with their individual pain and try to figure out their places...*

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church appears to have a "white bread and mayonnaise" homogeneity about it. The meeting brings out strong emotions in all the characters as they deal with

their individual pain and try to figure out their places in the world and within the church. Beatrice invites them all to attend her husband's church the next morning, before Sunday worship, where she celebrates the sacrament of holy communion with them.

This synopsis of the play sounds much like a story of "Once upon a time there were these homosexuals," and "they lived happily ever after." However, "HOME's" message, which is told mainly through its music, is on the

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*...the singing voices and Tim McGinley's musical score were superb.*

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different struggles that each character has with God, the church and his or her own life. While the acting could have been more fine-tuned in many cases, the singing voices and Tim McGinley's musical score were superb. The quality and diction were on the mark from all performers and they really put their heart and soul in the musical performances. This was not an easy production to tackle, especially when you take into account that the tour was performed in a variety of settings--from large stages to tiny sanctuaries--making it a major adjustment for the cast and crew each time it was performed.

"HOME" has many messages. It is about the struggles of life and of needing a foundation, a support, a refuge, a sanctuary--whatever one names it. In this play it is named "Home." And, according to "HOME," the church should play this role in our lives. "HOME" was not preachy, nor did it quote Bible passages *ad nauseam* about the homosexual issue. It showed

that the world is full of people of all persuasions (not just gay, lesbian and bisexual) who need community. And it is possible to find within that community a "Home." The play did not focus only on accepting the Christian God, but rather it focused on the fact that "Home" (or a centering foundation) is needed in order to start the journey towards becoming a full person in God's world. "Home" questions how the church conducts itself in the task of proclaiming God to all people. Although "HOME" is sponsored by the Reconciling Congregation Program, and one would think the message is about the church and the way it relates to homosexual issues, we felt the message dealt with many issues including racism, sexual abuse, child abuse, sexism, stereotypical roles, etc.

The other very strong theme that comes through in this production is defining what is "Home?" Neal and his friends became "Home" to one another by being able to get together to share their stories and deal with their individual grief. "HOME" made the valid point that what they needed to complete their "Home" was to invite God in as their center so they could be completely brought together and allow the church to become their "Home."

Kudos to Tim McGinley, the fine cast and crew of "HOME," and especially to the Reconciling Congregation Program for having the vision and foresight to produce this show and tour it around the Midwest this summer. Perhaps with some further financial support the RCP will be able to tour the show all across the country so everyone can have the opportunity to experience the wonderful message and music of "HOME."





Definition...from page one

\*\*\*\*\*  
"a landmark achievement" [said]  
Bishop Roy I. Sano...  
\*\*\*\*\*

The statement, approved by nearly 1,000 voting members of the denomination's California-Pacific Annual Conference, was called "a landmark achievement" by Bishop Roy I. Sano of Los Angeles.

It was presented by a committee appointed at the conference's 1993 session after members had reached an impasse on the issue.

Developers of the statement said they purposely focused on public declarations and behavior in consideration of the church's stated prohibition of "self-avowed, practicing homosexuals" as clergy.

\*\*\*\*\*  
..."with heavy hearts for the pain and suffering this issue has caused..."  
\*\*\*\*\*

The Rev. Lynne Hundley, co-convenor of the developing group, said it was offered "with heavy hearts for the pain and suffering this issue has caused and will continue to cause the church and persons we care about."

Hundley said the committee tried to represent a myriad of opinion in the conference and across the church on the issue of homosexuality, and to respect church law.

"It was not our job to decide the rightness or wrongness of homosexuality," she said. "Like it or not, the General Conference (the church's highest law-making body) has already done that."

The California-Pacific definition of an avowed homosexual is "one who affirms publicly and intends it to be known that she/he engages in or intends to engage in physical sexual behavior with a person of the same gender."

The practice of homosexuality is defined as "active involvement, with behavior that has a sexual-romantic focus."

\*\*\*\*\*  
...self-avowal is not implied by "a private conversation"..  
\*\*\*\*\*

The document also specifies that self-avowal is not implied by "a private conversation" or by "a statement under duress or in response to a direct question."

\*\*\*\*\*  
...practising does not mean...  
"speaking in support or in agreement with homosexuality."  
\*\*\*\*\*

Further, practicing does not mean "behavior such as friendship or two persons' living together as roommates; socializing or meeting with homosexuals; speaking in support or in agreement with homosexuality."

The issue of homosexuality and the ministry has been hotly debated since 1972, when the United Methodist Book of Discipline (church law) first included an assertion that homosexual behavior runs contrary to "Christian teaching."

Later, laws relating to ordained ministers were amended to prevent ordination of homosexuals.

\*\*\*\*\*  
...the Judicial Council ruled that ...each...conference must define...  
\*\*\*\*\*

Several attempts to pass a

churchwide definition of "self-avowed practicing" have failed. Last year, the denomination's "supreme court," the Judicial Council, ruled that General Conference and each adjudicatory or conference must define those terms for their own use.

The California-Pacific Annual Conference includes United Methodist churches in southern California, Hawaii and Guam. The denomination has 678 annual (regional) conferences in the United States, and 20 others in Europe, the Philippines and Africa.



Troy Conf...from page one  
ferent approach to the controversial topic.

They tabled all resolutions on homosexuality, engaged in silent meditation and prayer; listened to biblical scholars from both sides and, finally, worshipped together as a symbol of unity and reconciliation.

\*\*\*\*\*  
...a significant number of persons across the denomination continue to debate...  
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Although United Methodist law deems homosexuality "incompatible with Christian teaching," and prohibits ordination of gay men and lesbians as ministers, a significant number of persons across the denomination continue to debate the issue.

For Troy, a self-designated "reconciling" conference—one that declares itself open to and welcoming of homosexuals—the 1993 session reached a stand-off on the issue of same-sex "unions" or marriage. The action ended up on the docket of the Judicial Council.

Please turn to page twelve...



*Troy Conf...from page eleven*

(The council essentially ruled against holy unions, saying that only the churchwide quadrennial General Conference can adopt official liturgy, and that clergy must follow the official doctrine and ritual of the church.)

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*For the discussion on homosexuality planners set aside a half day...*

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This year, prayer was a centerpiece. Presiding Bishop William B. Grove appointed specific conference delegates to pray for the conference during legislative sessions. For the discussion on homosexuality planners set aside a half day of non-legislative agenda that began with worship.

Two seminary professors then made 45-minute presentations outlining the biblical and theological basis for two views, one upholding the church's official prohibitions, the other challenging it.

Affirming "moral absolutes" in the Bible—including condemnation of homosexual behavior, Catherine Clark Kroeger, Boston, nonetheless declared that, "God loves homosexuals."

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*"the faith journeys of homosexual persons have much to teach us."*

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A Presbyterian laywoman and professor at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, South Hamilton, Mass., Kroeger acknowledged that, "the faith journeys of homosexual persons have much to teach us."

She said, however, that Christians are called to certain standard of behavior, and said that homosexuality is clearly listed as

inappropriate in the Bible, which must be accepted as God's call for "sanctification of life."

Conversely, a Dallas theologian said United Methodism's current prohibition is too broad in condemning all homosexual practice and too narrow in reference to "Christian teaching."

The Rev. Victor Paul Furnish, a professor at Perkins School of Theology in Dallas, took what some feel is the liberal view.

Furnish said Christ's love is an unconditional gift, for all people. He also drew a distinction between sexual orientation and practice, and claimed that homosexual orientation is not in itself pathological.

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*"Everyone was encouraged just to listen and consider opposing views."*

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After the presentations, Kroeger and Furnish responded to one another, then to written questions from the conference delegates. No rebuttal was offered, said moderator Art Hagy. "Everyone was encouraged just to listen and consider opposing views."

Hagy, an ordained minister and superintendent of the Embury District, said the non-confrontational style was effective. "In the past, when one of the 'lightning rod' people would get up to speak on homosexuality, you knew that so-and-so was going to get mad.

"Without the pressure of voting someone's idea up or down, people were more willing to listen to one another," Hagy said.

Grove, bishop of the area since 1992, said this year's conference

sessions coincidentally marks the 250th anniversary of the first conference called in England by Methodism's founder John Wesley.

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*Early conferences were...brainstorming sessions...*

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Early conferences were not legislative, but rather were brainstorming sessions on how the church could better facilitate faith development and Christian charity.



*Teamwork...from page nine*

wanted to cry. It's really saying the whole process this church has gone through to look at our candidacy has opened up possibilities for people in the church to be more honest."

"For a prominent church in a large city in the country to say we will...stand up and say that Christianity embraces homosexuality as part of God's plan is amazing," Shull said. "And we will not only say that on paper, but give a foundation to that by calling [openly gay] clergy."

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*...all the people who told them they'd never get a church have been proven wrong.*

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Shull and Ilgenfritz are overwhelmed that this actually is happening: They had prepared themselves for the real possibility that it may very well might not happen in their lifetime. But the rage and pain of all the letters of rejection are behind them, and all the people who told them they'd never get a church have been proven wrong.

"Certainly 24 percent of the church didn't think it was a good idea," Ilgenfritz said. "But there was such energy last week. This is the kind of church we want to belong to."

